



NUBIAN EVIDENCE IN THE EGYPTIAN FIRST NOME: RESULTS OF THE 2013-2014 FIELD SEASONS OF THE ASWAN-KOM OMBO ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROJECT (AKAP)

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Since 2005 the Aswan-Kom Ombo Archaeological Project (AKAP), currently a joint venture between University of Bologna and Yale University, has been researching ancient Nubian evidence north of the First Cataract, both along the Nile and in the desert hinterland. A great number of sites related to a Nubian presence in the area have been recovered and often rescue excavated. Chronologically they cover a long timeframe, from prehistory to modern times. Unfortunately, most of the sites are now seriously under threat, more so after the 2011 Egyptian

revolution. Sites related to the A-Group and the Pan-Grave cultures, as well as to the Neolithic and Meroitic phases, have been already reported in previous publications.¹ In this short report we would like to preliminarily present three Nubian sites found in the past two field seasons.

WQ1 is a tumulus located in a small valley to the south of Wadi el-Qurna in West Bank Aswan (Figure 1). It appears to be an isolated grave, but the area is heavily disturbed by the construction of the electric line and desert tracks, thus the

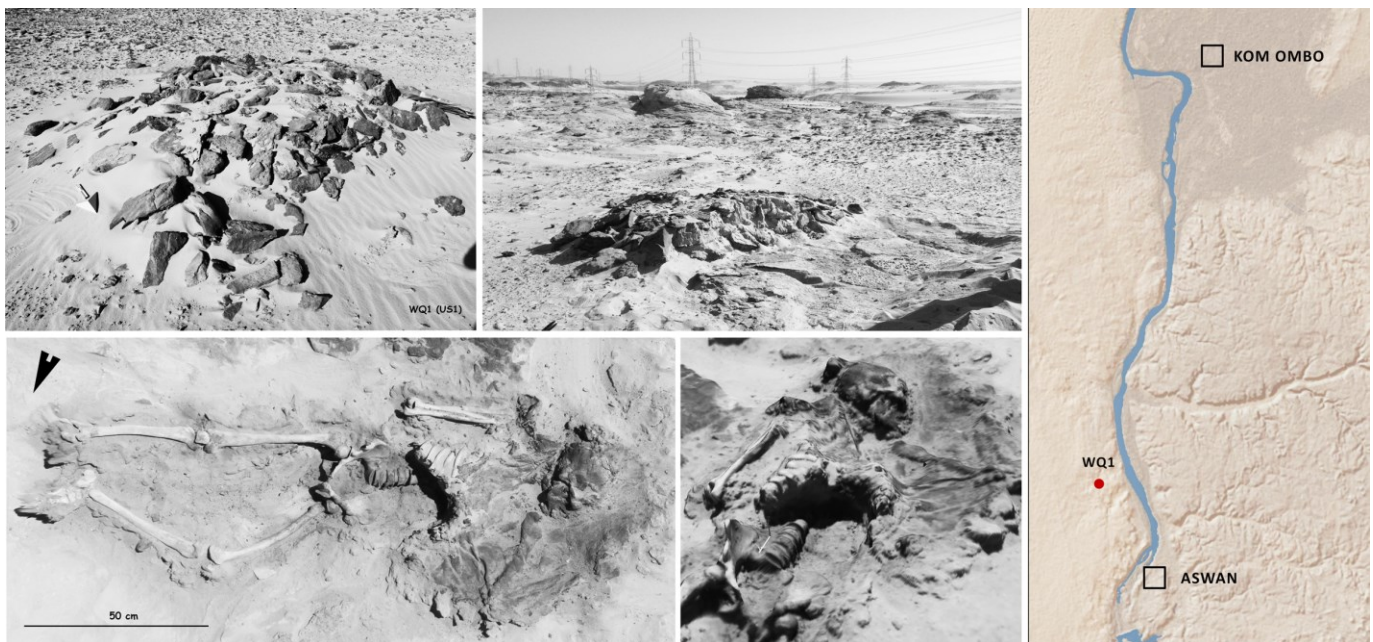


Figure 1: Tumulus WQ1 from West Bank Aswan, possibly Late Meroitic in date (AKAP Archive)

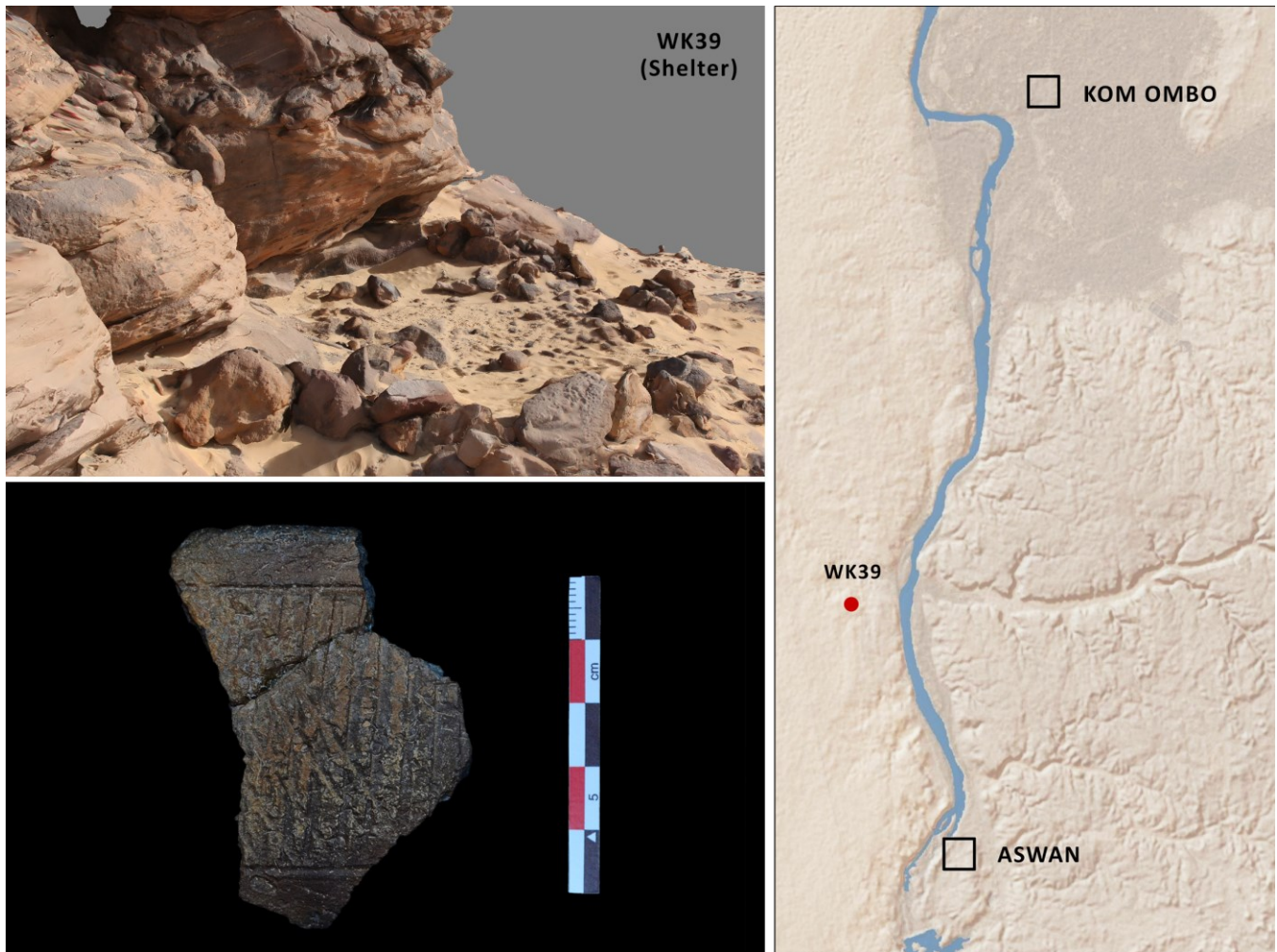


Figure 2: Shelter WK39 in Wadi Kubbaniya, with evidence of Pan-Grave occupation during the Second Intermediate Period (AKAP Archive)

presence of other tumuli cannot be easily ruled out without further investigations. The tumulus was the grave of an adult male who probably was killed during some kind of battle. In fact, a poorly preserved iron arrowhead with remains of the wooden shaft still attached was found close to the man's neck. The body was in an almost elongated position, and only the face was covered by sheep/goat leather. Other poorly preserved fragments of iron have been recovered in the grave; one in particular was close to the body's right knee. According to the arrowhead typology and material, the grave should be dated to the late first half of the first millennium CE.² More specifically, because of its characteristics, including location, stone super-structure, and inhumation typology, the tumulus should belong to a Nubian individual probably of the Late Meoritic/Ballana period. It is interesting to note that there was no grave shaft and the body was lying supine directly on the bedrock. The position of the tumulus stones followed a specific pattern made to cover the body without crushing it. Evidently the stone structure was built by his companions or, anyway, people who cared about the person. This

small grave gave insights to a Nubian presence in the area that is not directly connected to the elite or the religious sphere; also, it gave witness to a period of social uncertainty.

In Wadi Kubbaniya of interest is the finding of a small shelter with remains of two Second Intermediate Period Egyptian beaker-jars in Nile B2 and Marl A4, and remains of an incised Pan-Grave bowl (Figure 2). The site should have been a watch location overlooking the wadi or a shelter used by herders. This is the last of a number of Pan-Grave evidence we found in the area, which consists of cemeteries, campsites and a watch locale. A 3D reconstruction of the shelter has been made using a new "structure from motion" technique, which allows easily the making of a three-dimensional view from simple bidimensional pictures.

Remarkable is the finding in Wadi al-Lawi of two tumuli, unfortunately already plundered (Figure 3); one was still surrounded by remains of human and animal bones, lithic artifacts, pottery, Red Sea shells used as beads and two bone awls. The potsherds recorded are of small-to-medium-sized bowls, two of which are brown burnished and rippled on surface, while a third

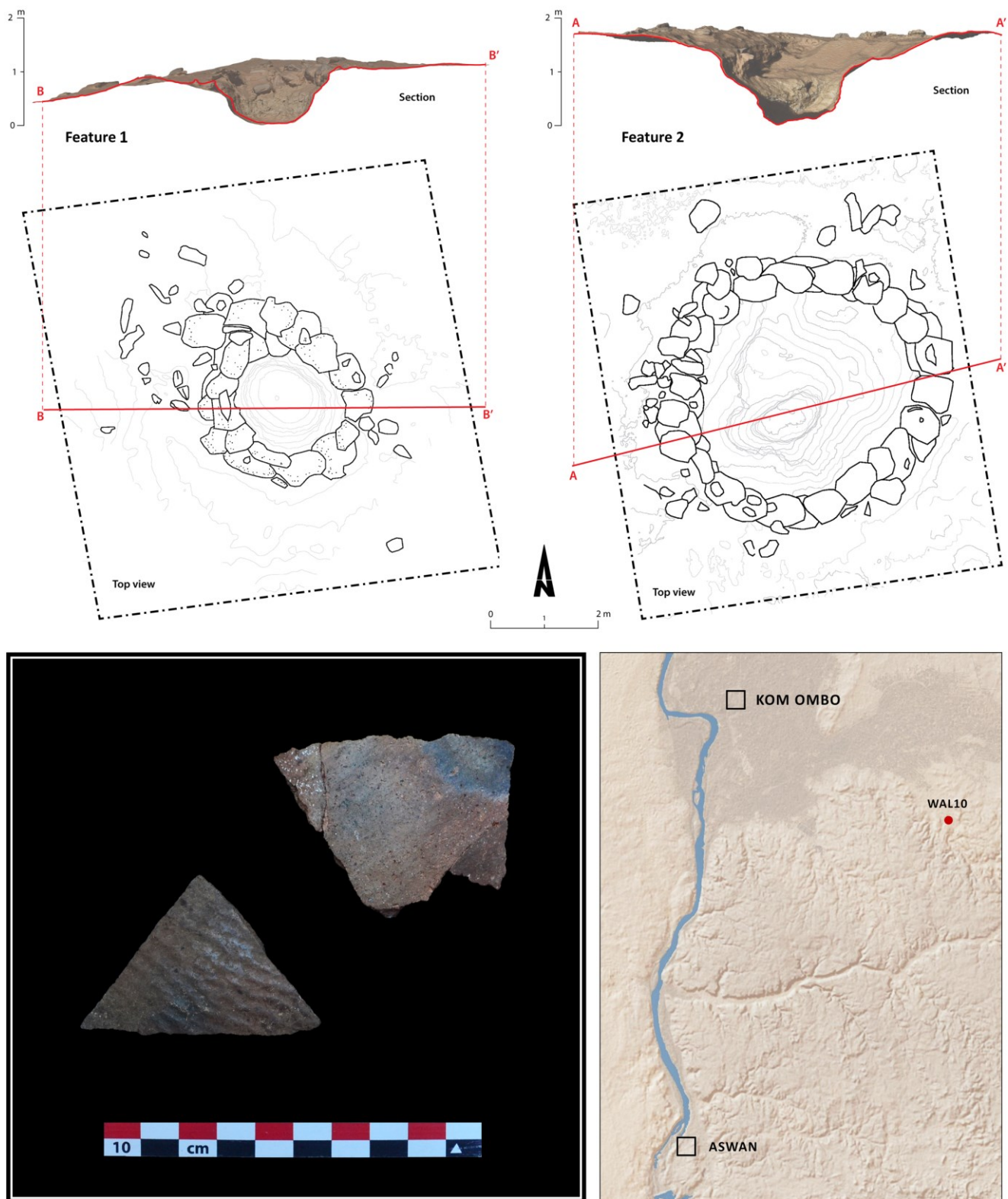


Figure 3: Neolithic tumuli from Wadi al-Lawi in the desert East of Kom Ombo (AKAP Archive).

is brown smoothed. The latter has a sand and fine shale tempered, while the others are untempered or tempered with a small amount of very fine dung. The rippled decoration and the sand and shale fabrics are characteristic of the fifth millennium BCE both in the Nile Valley and in the deserts, but as a combination they are distinctive of the Nubian-related Final Neolithic of Nabta Playa (mid-fifth millennium), suggesting a good chronological range for the tumuli. The predominance of quartz among the lithic is not surprising, given the projected age; quartz was a common material at this time, particularly in Nubia. Quartz and also the basalt,

which was used for few examples, would have been locally available in the wadi gravels, although the distribution of suitable quartz cobbles would have been spotty, based on field observations. The chert, instead, again used for few items, probably came from Nile gravels and was probably curated, as the played-out chert core suggests. The same can be said for the flint, which would have been imported. These graves are important findings, which add to the little Neolithic evidence now available from Upper Egypt south of Armant.

NOTES

¹ Particularly, M. C. Gatto, “Nubians in Egypt: Survey in the Aswan-Kom Ombo Region,” *Sudan and Nubia* 9 (2005): 73–76; M. C. Gatto, “Peripatetic Nomads along the Nile: Unfolding the Nubian Pan-Grave Culture of the Second Intermediate Period,” *Journal of Ancient Egyptian Interconnections* 6 .1 (2014): 11–28; M. C. Gatto, J. C. Darnell, M. De Dapper, G. Gallorini, R. Gerisch, S. Giuliani, E. Hart, S. Hendrickx, T. Herbich, H. Joris, I. Klose, C. M. Manassa, M. Marée, H.-Å. Nordström, M. Pitre, G. Pyke, D. Raue, R. Roma, P. Rose, D. Świąch, and D. Usai, “Archaeological

Investigation in the Aswan-Kom Ombo Region (2007–2008),” *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts Abteilung Kairo* 65 (2009): 9–47, pls. 1–8; M. C. Gatto and A. Curci 2010. “Ricerche archeologiche nella regione tra Assuan e Kom Ombo, Rapporto sulle missioni 2008/2009 e 2010,” in R. Pirelli (ed.), *RISE (Ricerche Italiane e Scavi in Egitto) IV* (Cairo: 2010), 163–176.

² For comparison see, e.g., W. B. Emery and L.P. Kirwan, *The Excavations and Survey between Wadi es-Sebua and Adindan: 1929-1931* (Bulaq: Cairo Government Press, 1935), fig. 138.2.4.